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THE LATE ELECTION IN MISSISSIPPI.

SPEECH

OF

HON. JOHN R. LYNCH,

OF MISSISSIPPI,

IN THE

25-70

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,

MARCH 1, 1877.

WASHINGTON.
1877.



SPEECH

OF

HON. JOHN R. LYNCH.

On the report of the select committee on the late election in the State of Louisiana.

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Speaker, I do not rise for the purpose of making a partisan speech. I recognize the fact that we are still in the midst of an important crisis, in consequence of which it behooves every lover of his country to put patriotism above party. It is not my purpose to speak with regard to the manner in which the late election was conducted in Louisiana, except in an incidental way. My main purpose is to call public attention to some of the grave irregularities that were committed in the State which I have the honor in part to represent upon this floor. It is hardly necessary for me to say that this is to me anything else but a pleasant duty. Every consideration of love of home, of section and people, would necessarily cause me to be anxious to throw the mantle of charity over the faults and shortcomings of that people, rather than expose them to the public gaze. I confess that my inclination is in this direction. But when the offenses of a people or a portion of them are sufficiently grave to bring reproach upon our institutions and demoralize society, then their concealment will be more in the nature of a crime than a charitable act. It is in obedience, therefore, to a sense of public duty that I shall lay before the country some of the causes that produced what is called by some, the great political revolution, in the State of Mississippi. But I shall not do this because the electoral votes of that State have been cast for the candidate of the democratic party. However anxious we may be that the man of our choice should be successful, yet I hold that it is the duty every true American citizen to cordially and cheerfully acquiesce in the will of the people when legally and fairly ascertained according to the forms of law, whether it be in accordance with our wishes or not. I presume there are none who will deny that the perpetuity of our system of Government depends upon the sacredness and security of the ballot-box, and that whenever our elective system ceases to be pure and sacred, then the foundation-stone of our governmental system will have been destroyed and the final dissolution of the Government, possibly through a bloody revolution, will be but a question of time.

Mr. Speaker, I have not the slightest hesitation in asserting that if elections such as the one held in Mississippi in November last are to be accepted by the people of this country as a legal and valid expression of the will of the people of a State, then indeed our elective system will have come to be a convenient medium for giving legal effect to the most outrageous frauds that were ever committed in the conduct of elections. The frauds that were committed upon the ballot-box in that State at the last election in the interest of the democratic party, to say nothing of terrorism and violence, were carried so far and were made so general in their application that they have not, in my judgment, a parallel in the history of a State in this Union

Mr. Speaker, these frauds were carried so far beyond the bounds of reason, decency, and propriety that no man who has the slightest regard for his reputation, who believes in maintaining and upholding our governmental system, can for a moment defend them, countenance them, or indorse them. The frauds that were committed in the sixth congressional district alone, to say nothing of violence, made a change in the vote of the State of not less than 10,000; and the frauds that were committed in that district, in connection with violence, made a change in the vote of the State of not less than 20,000. Some may think that these are extravagant assertions, but I make them upon my knowledge as a citizen of the State. Every assertion that I have made is susceptible of the clearest proof. To give some idea as to how the election was conducted, I will call particular attention to the sixth district. The counties of which that district is now composed have voted at previous elections as follows:

1869.	
Republican.....	20,949
Democratic.....	3,374
Republican majority.....	17,575
1871.	
Republican.....	20,312
Democratic.....	3,156
Republican majority.....	17,156
1872.	
Republican.....	21,389
Democratic.....	4,190
Republican majority.....	17,199
1875.	
Republican.....	15,895
Democratic.....	9,833
Republican majority.....	6,062
The following is the result in 1876:	
Democratic.....	15,788
Republican.....	11,188
Democratic majority.....	4,600

In 1875 fraud and violence were confined chiefly to four counties—Coahoma, Washington, Warren, and Claiborne. Otherwise the result would have been about the same that year as at previous elections. In 1876 the frauds that were committed in the four counties above named were made applicable to every county in the district, with possibly one or two exceptions. I will now give some particulars as to how the election was conducted in 1876:

ADAMS COUNTY.

The frauds that were committed in Adams County made a change of over 1,200 votes in that county alone. To give a correct idea of the strength of the two parties in the county, I will give the vote of the county at several preceding elections:

1869.	
Total vote polled.....	3,882
Republican.....	3,173
Democratic.....	709
Republican majority.....	2,463

	1872.	
Total vote polled		3,783
Republican		2,972
Democratic		811
Republican majority		2,161
	1875.	
Total vote polled		3,419
Republican		2,626
Democratic		793
Republican majority		1,833
	1876.	
Total vote polled		3,949
Republican		2,265
Democratic		1,484
Republican majority		581

The above is the vote for Congressman as officially returned. I do not charge and do not believe that the number of votes counted was in excess of the number actually polled; but by comparing the registered vote of each election precinct with the official returns of the precincts it will be clearly seen where the frauds were committed.

*Complete registration of Adams County, as it stood on election day,
November 7, 1876.*

Precincts.	Whites.	Colored.	Total.
Court-house	386	453	869
Jefferson Hotel	306	513	819
Dead-man's	22	261	283
Beverly	27	318	345
Kingston	54	448	502
Palestine	37	351	388
Pine Ridge	48	296	344
Washington	84	543	627
	964	3,213	4,177

Complete official returns of Adams County for election held November 7, 1876.

Precincts.	For electors—		For Congress.	
	Democratic.	Republican.	Chalmers, Democrat.	Lynch, Republican.
Court-house	416	400	416	400
Jefferson Hotel	339	434	340	426
Dead-man's Bend	30	223	30	223
Beverly	36	294	35	295
Kingston	396	91	402	85
Palestine	51	315	51	315
Pine Ridge	58	261	61	258
Washington	301	310	349	263
Totals	1,627	2,323	1,684	2,265

It will be seen from the above that the revolution in favor of democracy and "reform" was confined exclusively to two precincts—Washington and Kingston. The returns from the other precincts were just about as the republicans had calculated. What, then, was the cause of this great and unexpected change at Washington and Kingston? The answer is an easy one. There were over 600 republican tickets taken out of the ballot-boxes at those two precincts, and the same number of democratic tickets substituted in their stead. I went to Kingston on election day myself, and remained there from the time the polls were opened until two o'clock in the afternoon, at which hour the election officers took a recess for dinner. Up to that time 361 votes had been polled, and to my own personal knowledge over 300 of that number were straight republican tickets. One hundred and twenty-six votes were polled after dinner, about 85 of that number being republican. When the votes were counted at night there were just 91 votes in the box for the republican electoral ticket and 85 for the congressional candidate, thus showing clearly that all, or nearly all, of the republican votes that were polled before dinner were taken out of the box when they went to dinner and the same number of democratic tickets substituted in their stead. At the Washington precinct they took no recess for dinner, but after the polls were closed at night they counted a few tickets and then took a recess until the next morning. When they met the next morning to proceed with the count it was ascertained that between two and three hundred republican tickets had been taken out of the box and the same number of democratic tickets substituted in their stead. The objective point, however, was to carry the election for Congressman. In changing the tickets, therefore, they were generous and magnanimous enough to put in about fifty tickets containing the names of the republican candidates for presidential electors with that of the democratic candidate for Congress. This accounts for the material difference in the vote for President and Congressman. It is perhaps proper to state that the republicans were allowed but one inspector of elections at each box, and the ballot-box remained in the possession of a democrat.

PUBLIC OPINION.

It will perhaps be remembered by some that in a speech which I had the honor of delivering in this Hall during the last session of Congress I stated that the election of 1875 in the State of Mississippi brought to the front the worst element in the ranks of the democratic party in that State. The election of 1876 fully substantiated that assertion. Democrats who reside in counties that were allowed to go republican in 1875 have been tantalized ever since and characterized as cowards. Public opinion has become so demoralized that the commission of the most outrageous frauds upon the ballot-box is not only encouraged, tolerated, and justified, but it is absolutely demanded as a condition-precident to recognition in the party of reform according to the modern acceptance of that term. These frauds are apparently committed without the slightest compunction of conscience and without the slightest regard for any law, moral or statutory. To carry elections with or without votes, peaceably and fairly if possible, forcibly and unfairly if necessary, have now become to be settled maxims with the element that is now in the ascendancy in the democratic party in that State. Honesty and fairness in the management and conduct of elections on their part are the exception, and not the rule. But they did not seem to be satisfied with the inauguration of

the policy of fraud, but deemed it essential to inaugurate or rather continue the policy of violence as well. Nearly every democratic club in a number of counties in the State is an armed military organization, brought into existence for aggressive political purposes. In some of these counties the violence and terrorism was so intense that not a republican meeting was allowed to be held nor a republican speech to be made at any time during the campaign. It is hardly necessary to say that in such locations lawlessness reigns supreme. Republicans who reside in such localities are permitted to do so simply as a matter of favor and not as a matter of right. The only law that is recognized or respected is the law of force. There is absolutely no security for life, liberty, or property except such as may be afforded as a gracious favor by these armed clubs. I now call attention to Warren County.

In Warren County there are about seven thousand voters, and over five thousand of that number are colored men and republicans. In 1876 over three thousand republicans were positively denied the right to register and consequently the right to vote. To give a correct idea of the strength of the two parties I will give the vote of the county at several preceding elections:

1869.	
Total vote polled.....	5,638
Republican	4,560
Democratic	1,078
Republican majority.....	3,482

1872.	
Total vote polled.....	6,014
Republican	4,729
Democratic	1,285
Republican majority.....	3,444

1875.	
Total vote polled	5,643
Democratic	3,606
Republican	2,042
Democratic majority.....	1,564

The following is the result in 1876:

Total vote polled	2,658
Democratic	2,043
Republican	615
Democratic majority.....	1,428

The elections held in 1869 and in 1872 were conducted with perfect fairness, and can therefore be accepted as a fair test of the strength of the two parties. The election held in 1875 is generally admitted to have been a fraud and a swindle. Senators BAYARD and McDONALD, as members of the Senate committee that investigated the election of 1875, declared in their minority report that the election was a fraud, and that a ticket had been declared elected that had not been voted for by any one in the county.

The charge that over three thousand republican voters were denied the right to register and consequently the right to vote is fully substantiated by the official returns. In the country districts, where the colored voters are largely in the majority, the registrars would make affirmative answers to certain unlawful and unauthorized questions a condition-precedent to registration. Whenever a voter would fail to

give an affirmative answer to any one of these questions he was told to step aside. But in the city of Vicksburgh, where the bulk of the democratic vote of the county is, no such questions were asked, and thus every white man who desired to do so was allowed to register, while thousands of colored voters were denied that right. But even if those whom they allowed to register had been allowed to vote, and the votes counted as polled, the result in the county would have been different, for we find the registration, though incomplete and fraudulent, to be about as follows: whites 2,019, blacks 1,689.

It will be seen from the above that the democratic vote is only 24 in excess of the whole number of white men registered, while the republican vote is 1,074 less than the whole number of colored men registered. This result was brought about by refusing to receive the votes of a large number of colored men, and it is also believed that frauds were committed at several precincts, similar to those that were committed at Washington and Kingston, in Adams County. The Davis Bend box, where over 400 republican votes were polled, and not more than about 5 democratic votes were polled, was rejected by the registrars for alleged irregularities. They did not pursue the same course in this county that was pursued in a majority of the republican counties. In a majority of the republican counties they allowed the colored men to register and vote, but before proceeding with the count they would take out republican tickets by thousands and substitute democratic tickets in their stead, and then telegraph over the country that the colored men had voted the democratic ticket. In Warren County they thought it would be more convenient, and perhaps more honorable, to disfranchise the republican voters, and not allow them to vote at all. They were satisfied that the colored men were republicans, and, if allowed to vote at all, would vote for the candidates of that party. Every effort that had been made to induce them to join the democracy had proved unsuccessful.

The devotion manifested by the colored voters for the republican party under such circumstances is certainly worthy of the highest possible commendation, even though the wisdom or propriety of this devotion may sometimes be open to question. The democrats of Warren County know that the colored voters of that county are republicans, and therefore they concluded to disfranchise them by thousands.

Think of it, Mr. Speaker; here are more than three thousand sovereign citizens of this country; men who are clothed by the Constitution of their country with the right to participate in the choice of their own rulers; men who laid their lives upon the altar of their country in the hour of its need; and yet these men were positively denied the right to vote, for no other reason than because they are republicans. It cannot be said that they failed, refused, or neglected to conform to the requirements of law, for they did everything that the law required of them. Their disfranchisement was the result of a settled determination to deprive them of their rights and privileges of American citizens.

CLAIBORNE COUNTY.

In Claiborne County not less than 1,000 republican voters were positively denied the right to register. Terrorism and violence were inaugurated by the democrats and continued up to the election. The election was also characterized by great frauds.

The following information will show the strength of the two parties at several preceding elections:

	1869.	
Total vote polled.....		2,548
Republican.....		2,091
Democratic.....		457
Republican majority.....		1,634
	1872.	
Total vote polled.....		2,724
Republican.....		2,238
Democratic.....		484
Republican majority.....		1,752
	1875.	
Total vote polled.....		1,500
Democratic.....		1,094
Republican.....		496
Democratic majority.....		598
	1876.	
Total vote polled.....		1,924
Democratic.....		1,498
Republican.....		426
Democratic majority.....		1,072

The above figures speak for themselves. It requires no argument to show that the elections of 1875 and 1876 were carried by fraud, violence, and terrorism. In further proof of the charge that the election held in 1876 was characterized by great frauds, I will compare the total number of votes polled with the total number of voters registered :

Total number of voters registered.....	2,196
Colored.....	1,279
White.....	917

It will be seen that the total vote polled was only 272 less than the whole number of voters registered, while the democratic vote is 581 more than the whole number of white men registered and the republican vote is 853 less than the whole number of colored men registered. Admitting that the 272 voters who failed to vote were colored men, it will be seen that there were still 581 colored men who did vote, and whose votes were counted as having been polled for the democrats. That that number of colored men voted the democratic ticket is what no reasonable man who is familiar with the politics of the county will affirm.

JEFFERSON COUNTY.

In Jefferson as in Adams County the registration was conducted with fairness and impartiality; but a reign of terror was inaugurated throughout the county by the democrats. Republicans were not allowed to hold public meetings under any circumstances. The democratic party of the county is an armed military organization. Armed bodies of democrats would attend, interrupt, and break up every meeting the republicans would attempt to hold. The election was a farce from beginning to end, as will be clearly seen by comparing the election of 1876 with several preceeding elections.

	1869.	
Total vote polled.....		2,334
Republican.....		1,919
Democratic.....		415
Republican majority.....		1,504

	1872.	
Total vote polled.....		2, 152
Republican.....		1, 698
Democratic.....		454
Republican majority.....		1, 244
	1875.	
Total vote polled.....		2, 600
Republican.....		1, 922
Democratic.....		678
Republican majority.....		1, 244
	1876.	
Total vote polled.....		1, 965
Democratic.....		1, 545
Republican.....		420
Democratic majority.....		1, 125

There were registered in 1876 2,940 voters: 2,154 colored and 786 whites. It will be seen that the total vote polled was 975 less than the whole number of voters registered. The democratic vote was 759 more than the whole number of white men registered. Admitting that the 975 voters who failed or were denied the right to vote were colored men and republicans, still it will be seen that the difference between the republican vote and the whole number of colored men who voted is 759. The conclusion is irresistible that an organized system of frauds and swindles upon the ballot-box was inaugurated in nearly every republican county in the State. It was the settled determination of the democracy to carry the election peaceably and fairly if possible, forcibly and unfairly if necessary.

WASHINGTON COUNTY.

In Washington County the republicans were positively denied representation on any of the boards that were appointed for holding the elections at the several voting-precincts. There were registered in 1876 4,648 colored men, and 1,264 whites. Republican clubs were organized throughout the county with a membership of over three thousand, and yet the official returns as counted and officially promulgated are as follows: Democratic, 2,905; republican, 1,591; democratic majority, 1,314. The following is the vote of the county at several preceding elections:

	1869.	
Total vote polled.....		2, 670
Republican.....		2, 530
Democratic.....		140
Republican majority.....		2, 390
	1872.	
Total vote polled.....		2, 757
Republican.....		2, 562
Democratic.....		195
Republican majority.....		2, 367
	1875.	
Total vote polled.....		3, 681
Democratic.....		2, 043
Republican.....		1, 638
Democratic majority.....		405
	1876.	
Total vote polled.....		4, 496
Democratic.....		2, 905
Republican.....		1, 591
Democratic majority.....		1, 314

It will be seen from the above that the total vote polled in 1876 is 1,416 less than the total number of voters registered. Admitting that the 1,416 voters who failed, or were denied the right to vote were colored men and republicans, still the democratic vote is 1,641 more than the whole number of white men registered, while the republican vote is 1,640, one less than the whole number of votes polled by colored men, thus showing that the votes polled by that number of colored men were counted for the democrats. I am satisfied that not less than one thousand republican tickets, and perhaps two, were taken out of the ballot-boxes before they were counted and the same number of democratic tickets substituted in their stead. This system of fraud and swindling seems to have been inaugurated and successfully carried out in a majority of the republican counties in the State. I have selected five counties in the sixth district only for the purpose of giving an idea as to how the election was conducted throughout the State.

The following is a list of voters registered in the sixth district in 1876. I will state in this connection that the registration was conducted with reasonable fairness in all the counties in the district except Warren and Claiborne. In those two counties not less than 4,000 colored men were denied the privilege of registering.

Counties.	Colored.	White.
Tunica.....	1,500*	300*
Coahoma.....	2,003	735
Bolivar.....	2,850	850
Washington.....	4,648	1,264
Issaquena.....	1,402	245
Sharkey.....	700*	300*
Warren.....	1,689	2,019
Claiborne.....	1,279	917
Jefferson.....	2,154	786
Adams.....	3,213	964
Wilkinson.....	2,501	754
Total.....	23,939	9,134
Colored majority.....	14,805	

*Estimated.

THE FUTURE OF THE SOUTH.

As I have said on a former occasion, there is, in my judgment, a large element among southern white men who are honestly opposed to revolution, to violence, and to frauds in elections. So far as Mississippi is concerned I know this to be true. The element that supported H. S. Foote for governor as against Jefferson Davis; the element that earnestly opposed the secession of the State, but finally acquiesced in what they believed to be the will of the majority—this element is still strong in that State, but it has never yet been utilized. They have been made to believe that the policy of the republican party is inimical to southern interests, in consequence of which the mass of them have affiliated with an organization which has been the bane of the South for the last quarter of a century. It is to be hoped that the inauguration of a new administration will render possible the utilization of this element and thus prevent the ultimate destruction of that section of our country. If the present lawlessness is

allowed to continue; if mob law is allowed to take the place of civil law; if fraud is accepted as the popular method of carrying elections, and violence as the legitimate plan of controlling public opinion, then the decay of that section will necessarily follow. In this connection I will make a quotation from the minority report of Senators BAYARD and McDONALD, who, as members of a Senate committee, investigated the Mississippi election of 1875, which I cordially indorse:

Having thus stated the limitations upon the power of Congress, which a respect for the Constitution of our Government and to the decisions of its highest judicial tribunal has dictated, we cannot refrain from an expression of our abhorrence and hearty reprobation of every act of lawless and so often brutal interference with the rights of citizenship which were related by witnesses in our presence.

Prosperity and happiness can never thrive in a community where such scenes of violence can be enacted without condign punishment. By a law higher than man's the "wages of sin is death," and it will be vain for the people of Mississippi to look for the advancement of their State to that position in the ranks of wealth, influence, and reputation which those who love her would desire to see her occupy, until the spirit of law shall be strengthened and assert itself over the "dangerous classes," who have brought disrepute upon her good name.



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